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ABSTRACT

A study assessed employer attitudes and employer demand for student interns. A questionnaire was mailed to each of the 813 employers who used the internship program of the Communication Studies department at the University of California, Los Angeles. A total of 237 questionnaires were returned by intern supervisors in journalism, television, film, public relations, and the music industry, representing 31% of the target population. Results indicated that employers value interns, but many employers were unaware of some of the research skills and policy expertise which university-trained interns could provide. Findings suggest that with an experiential learning program in place, research policy internships could become a vital influence within the communication/entertainment industry, expediting the dissemination of academic findings to receptive employers, and thus doing much to promote investigative research and contribute to the success of business enterprise. (Contains 11 references. The cover letter and the survey instrument are attached.) (RS)

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Ascertaining Employer Attitudes:

A Communication Internship Survey

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Abstract

This research project was designed to assess employer attitudes and employer demand for student interns. The results provide a significant directive for instructors interested in understanding the potential role tht interns can play as participants in both field studies and in the communication/entertainment community. Employer responses to a survey questionnaire demonstrate that employers value interns. However, this study also disclosed that many employers are unaware of some of the research skills and policy expertise which university trained interns could provide. Results suggest that With an experiential learning program in place, research policy internships could become a vital influence within the communication/entertainment industry, expediting the dissemination of academic findingss to receptive employers, and thus doing much to promote investigative research and contribute to the success of business enterprise.

Ascertaining Employer Attitudes:

A Communication Internship Survey

A student internship program is important to any higher educational curriculum aimed at preparing students to compete in today's economy. Ideally, the purpose of such a course is to explore the relationship between a theoretical education and the pragmatics of professional practice. A desirable corollary benefit to be gained from such a program is the productive infusion of scholarly findings into industry.

Of course, attainment of these benefits is almost wholly dependent upon the type of employer-intern relationships that a program can cultivate. Lacking data for appraisal of past and ongoing relationships from the employers' perspectives, the authors undertook this research project to assess employer attitudes and employer demand for student interns. The results provide a significant directive for instructors interested in understanding the potential role that interns can play as participants in both field studies and in the communication/entertainment community.

Our findings indicate that instructors can seriously consider

expanding the frontiers of their internship pedagogical goals. By educating employers as to the value of utilizing their interns' knowledge of research policy, the contributions of interns and the relationship between academe and the community can be enriched.

Little prior research has been undertaken on student internship programs in communication. that is broad and concerned with employer attitudes. Although one hundred and thirteen publications were examined, an Eric Clearing House search of available publications uncovered no relevant studies. Research was predominantly devoted to the structural design of internship programs and methods of student grading. There were just a couple of reports concerning employer attitudes and each of these was directed at program operation, rather than internship programs. (Konsky, 1982 & Mason, 1990) A further search did reveal that much recent work has been undertaken, but with a focus only on broadcast journalism.

Important papers such as those by Dugas (1984), The Roper Organization Inc. (1987), Meeske (1988), and Hilt and Lipschultz (1993) address the impact of theoretical education on practical training in broadcasting skills, yet they do not extend their inquiry to other vital

communication/entertainment career areas.

The narrow scope of prior research regarding employer perceptions and beliefs is especially unfortunate since on site learning experiences are critical to university-practitioner relations as well as to the quality of the internship experience. The university is dependent upon the employer to create a constructive learning environment. Therefore, it is the employer who can best provide the information necessary for the design and implementation of a successful academic internship program.

This study was designed to solicit three types of information from prospective employers. First and foremost, the degree of utility employers derive from internship programs was assessed. Secondly, the specific skills that are particularly in demand were ascertained. Lastly, inquired was made into the potential contribution that could be derived from graduate student interns.

Method

A questionnaire was mailed to each of the 813 employers who utilize our internship program. A cover letter accompanying the questionnaire explained the need to evaluate programs that required university funding, and requested the employer's participation in this

project.

The questionnaire consisted of seventeen questions. The first fourteen were presented in a Likert scale format in order to facilitate numerical analysis. These were followed by three open-ended questions soliciting positive as well as negative responses to the internship program, and requesting any other comments employers might wish to volunteer. (Please see the appendix for samples of both the cover letter and the questionnaire.) All responses were coded and the frequencies were tabulated.

Results

The survey was addressed to intern supervisors in journalism, television, film, public relations and music industries comprising the "communication entertainment community." A total of 237 questionnaires were returned, representing 31% of the target population.

Responses to the fourteen questions which were formulated upon a Likert scale were dichotomized into two categories of 0-5 response. Responses of "one" or "two" were interpreted as reflecting a positive opinion, while responses of "four" or "five" were interpreted as reflecting a negative opinion.

We will summarize the frequency of responses by first reporting the plurality of positive, over negative responses for the first twelve questions of the survey:

Questionnaire Item		Plurality of Positive Responses
#1	Organizational value of interns	79.7%
#2	Organization learns from interns	29.9%
#3	Educational value of internship	84,5%
#4	Value of Intern Independence	64.5%
#5	Value of written skills	91.5%
#6	Value of oral communication skills	97.1%
#7	Likelihood of hiring someone with intern experience	51.9%
#8	Demand for graduate interns	16.2%
#9	Interest in research oriented graduate students	20.7%
#10	Creative perspective from graduate and undergraduate Liberal Arts Interns	57.8%
#11	Importance of creativity to organization	94.6%
#12	Importance of research skills	73. 9%

The plurality of positive responses for the first 12 questions averaged 63.5%.

Clearly, the internship program is valued by communication practitioners. 25.3% of respondents responded positively to Question #13, regarding utilization of academic research and 31.6% responded negatively. 43% of respondents gave either no answer, or indicated "no opinion". Although it is not surprising that internship supervisors might be unaware of current academic work, such neutrality could be regarded as "fertile ground" for future internship programs. Once such employers become cognizant of the benefits that information regarding new research could bring to their enteprise, they would be better able to decide on whether or not they wish to make use of graduate level interns as an academic resource.

21.9% of respondents responded positively to Question #14, regarding the value of an intern with policy related skills, and 27% responded negatively. 51.1% gave either no answer, or indicated "no opinion." These responses also indicate a potential for further interest, after these employers are enlighted as to the kinds of information a university intern educated in policy planning could provide.

Open Ended Questions #15, #16, and #17 requested written comments from respondents. #15 and #16 asked employers to identify what they liked and disliked, and #17 asked for any other comments.

These responses were coded into seven general categories. The categories are given below, with the percentage of comments volunteered for each one:

1.	Recruiting values of the internship program	56.5%
2.	New Ideas from interns	15.6%
3.	Positive personality traits of interns	29.5%
4.	Negative personality traits of interns	15.6%
5.	Need for more interns	38.8%
6.	Importance of Interns' oral communication	3%
7.	Importance of Interns' written communication	4.6%

Almost twice as many employers volunteered commentary on the positive traits of the interns who served them, as those who made some negative response. This result is in marked contrast to the findings presented in the Roper Report (1987) which were reiterated by Hilt in 1991, and which assert that a majority of broadcast journalists questioned the quality of interns at their television or radio stations. (p.

6) Our survey consulted a broader spectrum of employers from every aspect of entertainment/communication. Certainly the large percentage of our respondents who requested more interns also affirms the positive impression this program is making in the local marketplace.

Since preparation for a professional career is a major objective of education, we view the 56.5% of respondents who made some reference to the recruiting values of the internship program as resounding confirmation of the program's service in linking academic education more directly to community needs.

Discussion

Our basic finding is that a large percentage of employers in the communication industry view the internship program as beneficial. A surprisingly large percentage indicated a desire for more interns and declared that those they have used are a significant business resource, particularly as a recruiting tool. Respondents emphatically confirmed the value of interns' written and oral communication skills, Hilt & Lipschultz draw a similar conclusion from their study, (1993) where they find that general managers and news directors agree that the most important variables used in hiring are oral communication skills, self-motivation,

and writing skills (p.17). Since our study uniquely asked for employer judgments on the value of research skills, we can add this important category to Hilt & Lipschultz's study with our finding that employers consider research skills of equal importance to communication skills in the contributions interns made to their organizations.

The values placed on these three (written, oral and research intellectual skills), together with the strong affirmative responses to both questions regarding the importance of creativity (#10 & #11), as well as the high percentage of employers volunteering mention of fresh ideas absorbed from interns, indicates that the internship program provides intellectual exchange between the "basic" and "applied" areas of communication.

It is provocative that the phrasing of question #10 refers to creativity as a product of a liberal arts education, because Fisher, (1978) Dugas, (1984) and Dates, (1990) underscore the importance of liberal arts to the intern's professional success in the job market. Fisher, for example, concludes that the intern's future professional success requires the "mature understanding " coming from a liberal arts education (p. 144). Dugas, (1984) goes so far as to say, "In the fiercely competitive

broadcasting marketplace, students need both a comprehensive liberal arts education and thorough technical training to succeed (p. 23), and Dates concludes that "We must prepare students to participate in the world as people of intellectual competence and conscience." (p. 11)

Our study also confirms that the communication/entertainment industry will be a key player in our efforts to develop educational programs in communication policy. Communication policy is a subfield of communication research in which there is an especially strong demand for interns.

Conclusion

In an effort to further the partnership between academic scholarship and industry needs, this project has addressed employers' attitudes toward student interns. Our results clearly demonstrate that employers value interns. However, this study has also disclosed that many employers are unaware of some of the research skills and policy expertise which university trained interns could provide.

We would conjecture that this lack of awareness results from the employer's immersion in daily pragmatics. The pressures of maintaining organizational efficiency limit the employer's perspective on where and

how potential policy related research and policy oriented information from interns could be utilized.

Because such a large percentage of employers gave no response, or indicated "no opinion" to question thirteen regarding utilization of academic research, and to question fourteen regarding the potential contribution to planning which could be made by a research trained intern, we interpret the low level of opinionation as a "fertile ground" which could be cultivated. Indeed, the small percentage of employers who enthusiastically confirmed their use of academic research and rated the contribution they would derive from research trained interns very highly, suggests to us that the Communication Studies Program should move to aggressively publicize its policy oriented resources and the potential advantages from utilizing the knowledge of current research findings and policy skills provided by graduate level interns. Thus research policy internships could become a vital influence within the communication/entertainment industry expediting the dissemination of academic findings to receptive employers, and thus doing much to promote investigative research and contribute to the success of business enterprise.

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APPENDIX A

COMMUNICATION STUDIES
334 KINSEY HALL
405 HILGARD AVENUE
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024-1538

(DATE)

(COMPANY)
(ADDRESS)
(CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE)

Dear (EMPLOYER)

Many thanks for your continued participation in our UCLA Communication Studies Internship program. We are fortunate that the University has continued to fund this important program. It provides a valuable means of commingling academic scholarship with your business enterprise.

As you may be aware, the current stringent budgetary climate in which we now must function imposes a special evaluative burden upon every institution of higher education in America. The University is therefore called upon to carefully assess its allocation of funds. The traditional assumption that programs such as field studies are of value to both the community at large (in this instance the Communication/Entertainment Industries) and the educational mission of the university must be tested.

Therefore, in order to ensure that this internship program can continue, and to improve it so that it might better meet your needs, we would very much appreciate your participation in this research study.

We hope that you will be enthusiastic as we are at the prospect of participating in this unique project. For we have discovered that as far as the literature reveals, no such assessment of intern involvement in the Communication/Entertainment Industry has yet been undertaken.

Naturally, anonymity for all participating businesses will be maintained in our compilation and tabulation of the data. Of course we will be happy to share the results of this study with you on request. Please take the short time it requires to fill out the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us in the enclosed stamped and addressed envelope by June 4, 1993.

We do hope that you will join us in this groundbreaking research. With your help, the results will contribute valuably to the development and quality of University Internship Programs now and in the future.

Sincerely,

Shanto Iyengar, Marde Gregory, Eugenie Dye

APPENDIX B

Name of your Organization: _____

Principle Business Focus: _____

Number of Interns requested per year: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Your Name: _____

Your Title: _____

Please complete this page of information and return it along with the questionnaire.

Internship Program Questionnaire

Please respond to the following questions by circling a number from 1 to 5. Number **1** signifies ***Agree Strongly***, number **2** signifies ***Agree***, number **3** signifies ***No Opinion***, number **4** signifies ***Disagree***, and number **5** signifies ***Disagree Strongly***.

1. Interns have enriched our organization.
   Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

2. Our organization has learned a great deal from interns.
   Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

3. Our organization regards interning experience as very desirable on an applicant's resume.
   Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

4. University student interns are very able to work independently.
   Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

5. It is very important that interns have strong written communication skills.
   Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

6. It is very important that interns have strong oral communication skills.
   Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

7. We are more likely to hire applicants who have had internship experience.
   Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

8. It would be very worthwhile to our organization to have a graduate level student intern design a project specific to our needs.
   Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

9. Our organization is very interested in the perspective which research oriented graduate level student interns would provide.
   Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

10. Undergraduate and graduate interns from the Liberal Arts Disciplines bring a very creative perspective to our organization.
    Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

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continued

11. Creativity is very important to our business.
Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

12. Research skills are very important to our business.
Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

13. Our organization utilizes methodology developed from Academic Communications Research.
Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

14. An intern who has a University level education in Policy Research related skills would make a strong contribution to the planning processes in our organization.
Agree Strongly 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree Strongly

15. What do you like most about your internship program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

16. What do you like least about your internship program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

17. Other comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____